SECTION III – B
MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS FOR LEGISLATED PROGRAMS

1. Highly Erodible Land (HEL)

This section applies only to conservation plans and systems developed for compliance with the highly erodible land provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, as amended. This Act is commonly referred to as the "Farm Bill."

Basic Conservation System (BCS)

The purpose of a Basic Conservation System is to reduce soil erosion on HEL cropland fields to acceptable levels. (Refer to the National Food Security Act Manual for additional details concerning requirements for HEL conservation plans and systems.) In Maryland, a Basic Conservation System may consist of any combination of vegetative, structural, and/or management practices that reduce soil loss to the sustainable soil loss tolerance amount ("T") for the rotation of the management unit. Treatment of sheet, rill, and ephemeral gully erosion is required.

Alternative Conservation System (ACS)

An Alternative Conservation System may be used when certain crop, social, or economic considerations preclude the use of a BCS. An ACS must be limited in scope.

The following Alternative Conservation Systems are pre-approved for use in Maryland:

A. ***Fields with permanent irrigation systems*** – When HEL fields are used for fruit or vegetable production, the use of permanent (non-portable) irrigation systems may make application of a BCS impractical, and moving the irrigation system may be uneconomical. An ACS that includes a cover crop and contour buffer strips (previously referred to as narrow in-field filter strips) may be used. Treatment of ephemeral gullies is required.

B. ***Noxious weed or insect problems*** – Chronic and widespread noxious weed or insect problems may require the use of a specific tillage method or crop rotation to control the problem. This may make application of a BCS impractical. An ACS should be developed that contains all components of a BCS that are compatible with the tillage method or crop rotation prescribed to treat the special problem. A minimum of two years of conventional tillage in either corn or soybeans is usually needed. If more years of conventional tillage are needed, the treatment should be limited to the infested area only. The Maryland Cooperative Extension county agent should be consulted when developing the ACS to ensure that the ACS and prescribed special treatment are compatible. At a minimum, cross-slope farming is required. Treatment of ephemeral gullies is also required.

C. ***Small fields that are intensively cropped*** – HEL fields that are three (3) acres or less in size that are intensively cropped include tobacco, fruits or vegetables. These fields may be treated with an ACS if it is impractical or uneconomical to apply a BCS. The ACS contains cross-slope farming and a cover crop. Treatment of ephemeral gullies is required.

D. ***Orchards*** – HEL fields that are used for orchards need to be replanted periodically. When doing this, producers may use a short rotation of row crops to help control grub, nematode, or noxious weed problems. These fields may be treated with an ACS if it is impractical or uneconomical to apply a BCS. The ACS contains a crop rotation of Corn – Small Grain – Hay/Grass, followed by replanting of the orchard. Cross-slope farming must be used during the crop rotation.

Treatment of ephemeral gullies is required. The Maryland Cooperative Extension county agent should be consulted when developing the ACS to assure that the ACS and prescribed special treatment are compatible.

E. ***Wind erosion on fruit or vegetable fields*** – HEL fields that are used for fruit or vegetable production may have a wind erosion problem. Most fruits and vegetables cannot tolerate wind erosion. The blowing wind and soil particles cause damage to the crop, resulting in an economic loss. Where protection of the crop from wind erosion is needed, these fields may be treated with an ACS if it is impractical or uneconomical to apply a BCS. The ACS will contain a cover crop and wind strips or wind barriers. Treatment of ephemeral gullies is required.

Unique situations may require development of additional ACS's. To use an ACS that is not included in the above list, follow the planning and approval requirements specified in the National Food Security Act Manual.